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Gender inequality and food insecurity: A dozen years after the food price crisis, rural women still bear the brunt of poverty and hunger

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1. Introduction

The global food price crisis of 2007–08 underscored how fragile livelihoods are among the world's extremely vulnerable people, as it drove 44 million people in developing countries into poverty ([World Bank, 2011](#)). In the aftermath of the crisis, in 2009 the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimated in 2009^a that almost 1 billion people worldwide were undernourished ([FAO, 2009a](#)).

As this chapter will show, the crisis disproportionately affected women. In 2009 the UN World Food Programme (WFP) calculated that women and girls accounted for 60% of chronically hungry people around the world ([WFP, 2009](#); see also [Scott-Villiers et al., 2016](#)).

The flurry of policy action in the months and years following the price spike brought some hope that the world's governments were prepared to tackle the structural factors behind the crisis, which had a severe impact on vulnerable people's resilience to shocks. The effects proved especially severe for women small-scale agricultural producers.

A dozen years later, despite the international commitment to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 of zero hunger, too many of the policies that precipitated the food price crisis remain in place ([Wise and Murphy, 2012](#)). The United Nations food, agriculture, and health agencies estimate that the number of hungry people in the world increased by 10 million in 2019, and rose by 60 million over the preceding 5 years ([FAO et al., 2020](#)). Viewing food insecurity through a somewhat different lens, the agencies also

^a Following these estimates of hunger, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) recommended that FAO revise its much-criticized methodology for counting the number of undernourished people. This new methodology included updated population estimates and household surveys on food consumption, and took into account food waste at the distribution level. It was used for the first time in the *State of Food Insecurity Security in the World 2012* (SOFI 2012) ([FAO, 2012](#)) report, and the hunger trends observed showed significant changes. The methodology has been under constant revision since then, with new indicators added to make it more complete. Therefore, it is not possible to compare figures across annual volumes of the SOFI report.

estimated that over 3 billion people (38.3% of the world's population) cannot afford a healthy diet (FAO et al., 2020). Women smallholder farmers are among the worst affected, and remain far from realizing their human right to adequate food.

Looking back in 2020, reconsideration of the long-term impacts of the food-price crisis and the impacts of the policy response is long overdue. It has become clear that we will not achieve SDG 2, given that the structural causes of hunger remain unaddressed and that additional issues have become more salient since 2007.

This chapter will proceed as follows:

- Reflecting on how the existing challenges faced by women smallholder farmers were exacerbated by the structural causes of the food price crisis;
- Examining major policy responses from governments and the private sector and analyzing their effectiveness in addressing the structural causes of the crisis;
- Setting out the lessons learned from the major failures of this policy response;
- Identifying key challenges and gaps in financial aid to women smallholder farmers and, more specifically, looking at the level of official development assistance (ODA) targeted to them since 2008; and
- Providing policy recommendations to address all of these issues.

The challenges and questions raised by this chapter remain substantial, diverse and context-specific. Although we cannot explore these topics exhaustively, we hope to contribute to renewed calls for justice and the right to food for the hundreds of millions of people who remain hungry in a time of plenty.



2. Underlying structural factors (2008–11) and their impacts on women

2.1 What led to the food price crisis?

The term “global food price crisis” usually refers to one of the biggest price surges (De Schutter, 2008) in a period of extreme volatility for primary commodities, mainly the most widely consumed cereals, which had peaks in the second half of 2007 and the first half of 2008 and another spike in 2010–11. Between March 2007 and March 2008, maize (corn) prices rose 31%, those of soybeans jumped 87% and wheat prices ballooned 130% (FAO and OECD, 2011). The price of rice climbed fourfold during January–April 2008,

as several major exporters embargoed foreign sales of this lightly traded commodity (FAO and OECD, 2011).^b Global food prices declined from their peak in June 2008, as the world economy fell into recession (Fig. 1).

Prices remained relatively stable until the first half of 2010 and then began rising again, reaching an all-time high in February 2011 (FAO, 2020) (Fig. 1). Severe drought in major exporting countries was the key short-term factor contributing to this second spike (Trostle, 2011).

As a study by the Institute of Development Studies conducted for Oxfam noted, the rise in prices pushed low-income people, who precrisis frequently spent 50% or more of their incomes to buy food, further into poverty and increased their difficulties in maintaining basic consumption levels:

People for whom securing food has already absorbed a large share of their resources and energies before the food crisis came under intense pressure to alter their relationship to food and thus to the economy—to spend more time earning more money to cover basic provisioning and to extract more value from whatever they consumed.

Scott-Villiers et al. (2016).

In other words, the crisis posed a severe threat to the right to adequate food for millions of people (De Schutter, 2008).

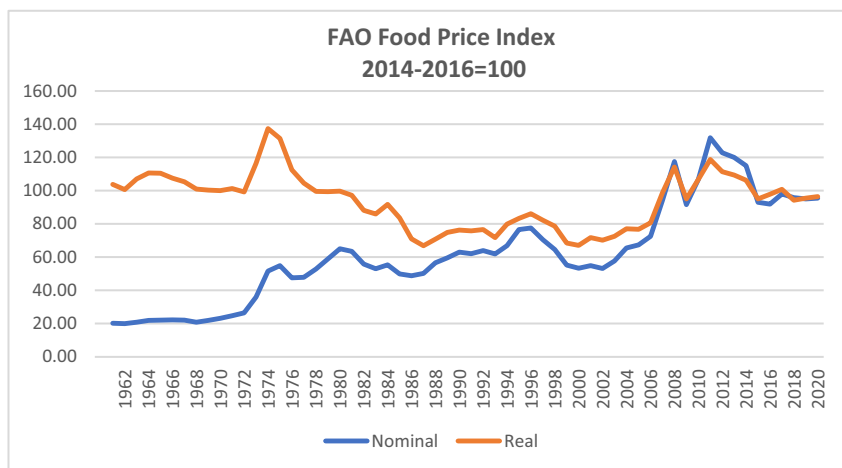


Fig. 1 World Food Prices, 1961–2020, in nominal and real terms. Source: FAO, 2020. FAO Food Price Index Database. <http://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/>.

^b A very small share of global rice production is traded internationally, compared with the shares of wheat and coarse grain production (FAO, 2019a).

A broad variety of causes led to the 2007–08 food price crisis, and views on the weight to give to long-term trends vary in the literature (Scott-Villiers et al., 2016). Nevertheless, as Olivier de Schutter, then the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, observed in 2008, “The disaster which results from the increase of international prices of food commodities is a man-made disaster. The causes are identifiable” (De Schutter, 2008). The agri-food system and its contradictions contain a number of hidden causes of the crisis, what we call “structural factors”: liberalization of agriculture and trade, concentration of distribution and inputs marginalizing smaller production units and decreases in investments in agriculture and development assistance to the sector in a context of increasing climate change. These long-term trends made smallholder farmers more vulnerable to shorter-term “conjunctural factors” experienced in the more immediate run-up to the crisis. These conjunctural factors consist mainly of an evolution of fundamentals of the market—supply and demand (Bricas and Goïta, 2018; Clapp and Cohen, 2009)—and marked an increased level of globalization (Scott-Villiers et al., 2016), creating an even more unfavorable economic context for smallholder farmers.

2.1.1 Structural factors

2.1.1.1 Liberalization of agriculture

In the decade prior to the crisis and following adoption of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Agriculture of 1995 and the World Food Summit in 1996, there was a major shift in global food and agriculture, with lower trade barriers and more open markets. However, countries with weak market infrastructures and those that relied on a small number of export commodities did not gain from liberalization and faced risks associated with increases in world food prices, which would mean considerably higher import bills, potentially requiring them to spend their foreign-exchange reserves (Trueblood and Shapouri, 2001). For farmers, this shift encouraged less production of traditional food crops—which frequently were the crops that women farmers produced—in favor of crops for domestic and export markets, increasing their exposure to the volatility of those markets and their dependence on purchased inputs (UN Women, 2014).

Most low-income countries moved rapidly away from self-sufficiency in food and in turn opened their domestic markets to external produce. From 2004, sub-Saharan Africa became a net food importer (Fig. 2), despite an impressive increase in regional production of major crops.

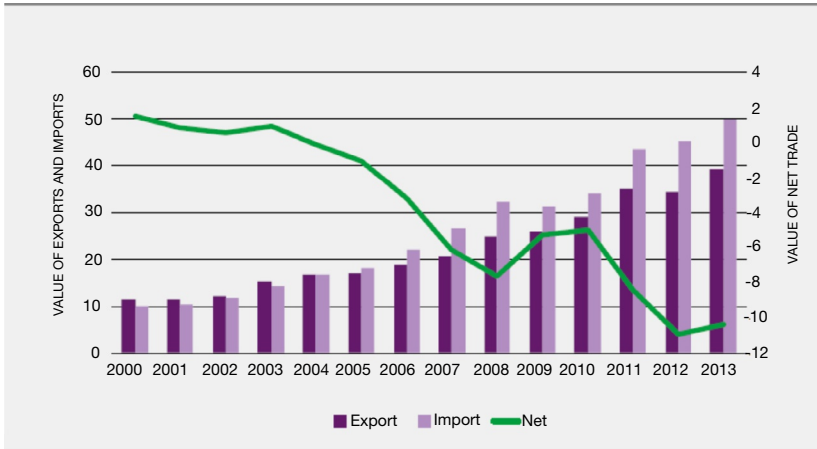


Fig. 2 Net agricultural trade in sub-Saharan Africa 2000–13 (\$ billions). *Source: FAO, 2018. The State of Agricultural Commodity Markets 2018: Agricultural Trade, Climate Change and Food Security. Rome: FAO. <http://www.fao.org/3/I9542EN/i9542en.pdf>.*

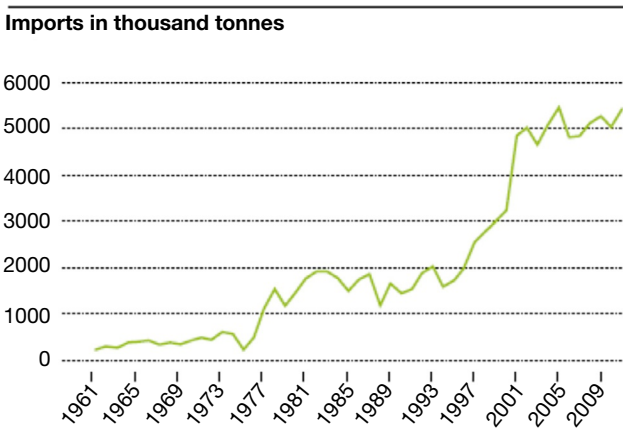


Fig. 3 Rice Imports in West Africa, 1961–2009. *Source: OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), 2011. The 2008 Rice Crisis: Shock and New Challenges. West African challenges. Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat. <https://www.oecd.org/swac/publications/48356981.pdf>, based on US Department of Agriculture data.*

Between 2004 and 2007, only one-fifth of African food exports stayed in African countries, and 88% of agricultural imports came from other continents (Rakotoarisoa et al., 2012). West Africa tripled its rice imports in the 1990s (Fig. 3) (OECD, 2011).

Outside of Africa, Haiti reduced its tariff on imports of rice—the daily staple for most Haitians—from 50% to 3%. From near self-sufficiency, the country went to importing 83% of its rice consumption, and has now become the second largest market for US rice (Cohen, 2013; Oxfam, 2008).

2.1.1.2 Concentration of distribution and inputs

Liberalization policies have also facilitated the overwhelming market supremacy of a small number of large companies, from farm inputs to sales of food to consumers. As McKeon (2018) has observed, “Corporate power in food chains has continued to grow unabated, with the mega-mergers of major agribusiness multinationals threatening a further concentration” Over the past few decades, four firms, known as the ABCD companies—Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), Bunge, Cargill and Louis Dreyfus—have come to virtually control trade in grain and oilseeds (Murphy et al., 2012; Plume, 2019). Such concentrated market power is often seen in low-income countries that typically have at best insubstantial market regulation. In the agrochemical sector in the late 1980s, the top 20 companies accounted for 90% of global sales. By 2002, seven companies controlled the same market share (Humphrey and Memedovic, 2006). In 2017, as a result of the mega-mergers that McKeon highlights, three companies (Bayer, DowDuPont^c and ChemChina) stood poised to claim a 60% share of global commercial seed and agro-chemical sales (Friends of the Earth Europe et al., 2017). However, the ability of these firms to administer the prices of seeds, for example, varies according to crop and country context (Cavero and Galiá, 2008; OECD, 2018a).

2.1.1.3 Public investments in agriculture

The rate of growth of public spending on agriculture slowed dramatically during 1980–1990, and it stagnated in Africa. However, spending rose steadily in Asia, and doubled during the two decades after 1980. In the absence of public funding, smallholder producers, particularly women farmers, had little ability to bargain with large agribusiness firms, middlemen or credit providers (UN Women, 2014).

The slowdown in public agricultural spending had devastating effects on agricultural research, particularly in Africa, where research expenditures were flat during 1980–2000 and fell in the 1990s.^d Private agricultural

^c In 2019, DowDuPont spun off its agricultural division as Corteva Agriscience.

^d See chapter by Stuti Rawat, this volume, for a more detailed discussion of trends in public spending on agricultural research.

research is unlikely to address the problems facing low-income farmers, given the unlikelihood of a sufficient return on investment in the short-to-medium term.

2.1.1.4 Decreased aid to agriculture

The public expenditure trend was not offset by ODA to agriculture. The period between 1985 and 2005 was marked by low food prices and a sharp reduction in aid to agricultural development and investments from OECD countries and multilateral agencies (Fig. 4; see also HLPE, 2011). Most of the aid that there was continued to focus on staples productivity; greater support for fruits, vegetables and legumes could have benefited smallholders (Pingali, 2015). By 2000, agriculture's share of bilateral aid had fallen to a quarter of its former level, and the trend was similar for multilateral agencies: agriculture fell from 30% of World Bank lending in 1980 to just 12% in 2005–07 (Brock and Paasch, 2009).

2.1.1.5 Climate change

Climate change is resulting in more frequent and more severe heat waves, droughts and floods, which can decimate farm production. Its effects contributed to food price increases in 2007–08 and also in 2010, with severe droughts in Australia, Canada, Argentina and the United States, all major cereals producers (FAO and OECD, 2011). There were droughts in East Africa in 2005, 2006, 2008 and 2011 (Bailey, 2013). The last of these affected more than 13 million people and resulted in the famine in Somalia that killed 260,000 people (News Centre, 2013). Models linking yields of commodity

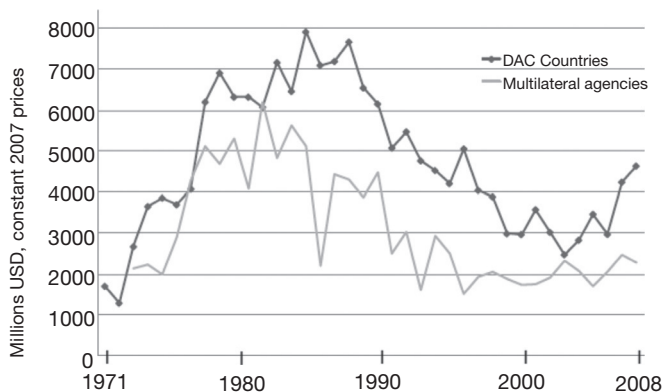


Fig. 4 ODA to agriculture, DAC countries and multilateral agencies, 1971–2008. *Source: Authors' calculations from OECD, 2020. OECD.Stat Database. <https://stats.oecd.org/>.*

crops to weather indicate that global maize and wheat yields between 1980 and 2008 may have been, respectively, 3.8% and 5.5% lower than they would have been without the effects of climate change (Lobell et al., 2011).

2.1.2 Supply and demand factors leading to the food price crisis

2.1.2.1 Supply

2.1.2.1.1 Slowing growth in productivity Due to structural factors—such as a more restricted government role in agriculture in developing countries, less agricultural investment, reduced public agricultural research expenditures and the effects of climate change (Mittal, 2008)—growth in food crop production slowed from the mid-1990s. For cereals, which cover over half of the world's farm land, yield growth fell from 3% annually in the 1960s to a little more than half of that in the 1990s, then increased to nearly 2% in the 2000s (FAO, 2013a).

2.1.2.1.2 Escalating crude oil prices have led to rising farm production costs In the 21st century, increases in the prices of fertilizer and oil, which are key farm inputs, have exceed those for agricultural produce (Fig. 5). This has created further financial difficulties for farmers, as most developing country governments have reduced or eliminated subsidies on inputs and assistance with credit and marketing for smallholders (UN Women, 2014).

2.1.2.2 Demand

2.1.2.2.1 Strong growth and evolution in demand, based on an expanding urban population Between 1960 and 2010 the world's urban population tripled (World Bank, 2020), and this was associated with a growing urban middle class. Food consumption habits evolved and all regions in the world saw increased meat consumption and thus a rising demand for grains for animal feed (see Fig. 6).

During this same period, global food trade concentrated on just four main crops: rice, maize (this, in particular, is an important animal feed as well as a major direct source of human food in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Latin America) and wheat, plus soybeans (directly consumed by humans, an input into processed foods, an animal feed and also a source of biodiesel) (McCreary, 2011). The trends of dependence on the three major global cereals and on imports for food supplies have been simultaneous and mutually reinforcing. In sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia—which are home to the majority of the world's food insecure people and thus constitute hunger's

center of gravity—consumption of these cereals has steadily displaced traditional staples such as millet, sorghum, bananas, cassava, potatoes, sweet potatoes and beans over a long period. The trend was remarked on by people interviewed during the 2007–08 crisis, who repeatedly mentioned the decline of “traditional” foods due to reduced availability, higher cost and longer preparation time (Scott-Villiers et al., 2016).

2.1.2.2 Rapid expansion of biofuels production The expanded production of biofuels was a key driver of the food price crisis: increased biofuel demand in the United States, due to legal mandates to blend ethanol into petrol, pushed up maize prices and probably also those of soybeans, while EU and European expansion of oilseed production for biofuel led to higher wheat prices (Fig. 7; see also Headey and Fan, 2010). Governments across the world attempted to reduce dependency on oil, increase the use of renewable energies and halt declines in farm income, and approved legislative instruments that encouraged the biofuels industry. Those policies, led mainly by rich countries, created a demand shock in international markets (Wise and Murphy, 2012). During a very short period before the crisis, 15% of the global maize supply was diverted to the US ethanol program. Moreover, biofuels have direct impacts on land use and land rights, compromising food security. The EU’s bio-energy policy helped biofuels industries to prosper, but the 70,000km² of EU land devoted to biofuels crops in 2008 could have grown enough food for 127 million people that year (Herman and Mayrhofer, 2016).

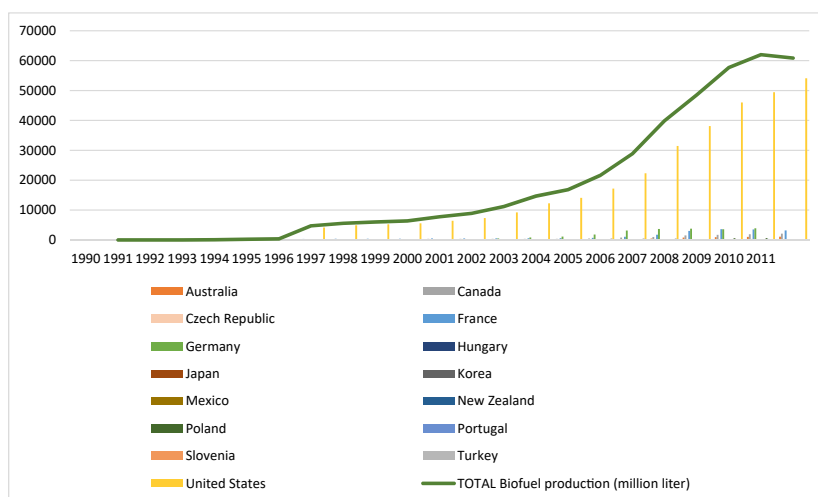


Fig. 7 Biofuel production trends 1990–2011 (million liters). Source: OECD, 2020. OECD. Stat Database. <https://stats.oecd.org/>.

2.1.2.2.3 Declining stocks A low “stock-to-use” ratio due to low stocks, high demand or both creates upward price pressure (FAO, 2009b). Low stocks are a vulnerability factor, especially for countries already at high risk vis-à-vis prices, since reserves provide a buffer against both rising prices and poor harvests (Wise and Murphy, 2012). In 2007–08 the world cereal stock-to-use ratio stood at an all-time low of 19.6% (FAO, 2009b).

2.1.2.2.4 Dollar devaluation Depreciation of the US dollar also played a role in food price escalation. In general, a weaker dollar is associated with commodity price increases (FAO, 2009b; Headey and Fan, 2010). For countries that tie their currency to the dollar or that have a weaker currency, dollar depreciation makes food imports more expensive (FAO, 2009b).

2.1.2.2.5 Increasing speculation in commodities Dollar depreciation also made food commodities attractive to investors, especially as technology and housing “went bust” (Clapp, 2009). The growth of food commodities investment became mixed up with the financial crisis of 2007–08, which persuaded many noncommercial traders (whether considered “investors” or “speculators”) to move their money away from collapsing stock, bond and property markets and into the commodity futures trade (FAO, 2009b). Such large-scale speculation contributes to commodity price volatility and gives inappropriate market signals to agricultural producers (FAO, 2009b).

2.1.2.3 Policies of exporters and importers in reaction to the crisis

From the beginning of the food price crisis, the rice market came under pressure because some governments imposed bans on exports (such as restrictions on non-Basmati exports by India,^c a leading exporter) (USDA/FAS, 2019) and major importers such as the Philippines made large-scale purchases, seeking to lock in prices as a hedge against further increases (Childs and Kiawu, 2009). Like the diversion of maize to biofuels, all this created distrust on the global markets and exacerbated upward pressure on prices.

Because of the large amount of international trade in wheat and maize at a time of extremely low global stocks, the price increases quickly spread to many national markets. However, transmission of world market prices to domestic markets varied greatly from country to country: In China and India, domestic prices were virtually unaffected; in Brazil and South Africa

^c India lifted this ban, imposed in April 2008, in 2011. During the period of the ban, Thailand, Pakistan and Vietnam, among others, moved in to replace Indian exports. It served to keep rice affordable for Indian consumers, but adversely affected (albeit marginally) India’s foreign exchange earnings. Since lifting the ban, India has become the world’s largest exporter of rice. The authors are grateful to Ranu Bhogal of Oxfam India for pointing this out.

prices increased in line with international markets; but in Ethiopia and Nigeria domestic prices increased dramatically. In general, according to one analysis, there were “higher price transmission rates for import dependent countries, including rice in Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger... and Uganda, maize in Malawi and Uganda, and wheat in Ethiopia” (Baltzer, 2013). The degree of price transmission was affected by domestic and trade policies in importing countries.^f

2.2 Impacts and long-term effects on women smallholder farmers

The events of 2007–08 brought into plain view the cracks in an unsustainable food system that was already having severe negative effects on the basic livelihoods of smallholder farmers (Murphy and Schiavoni, 2017). The structural factors outlined above (liberalization of the agri-food system, concentration in input and output markets, a decrease in public investments in agriculture, declining aid to agriculture) showed how unbalanced the system had become, privileging big agri-food businesses and making low-income people even more vulnerable to the conjunctural factors of the crisis. These short-term factors triggered the crisis and further impoverished the poorest people, denying them their human right to adequate food and nutrition and illustrating the global food system’s failures (Murphy and Schiavoni, 2017).

Rural people, and especially farmers, were on the front line. People living in rural areas are among the poorest in the Global South and at the time of the crisis three-quarters of them were living on less than the equivalent of \$1 a day, and spending up to 80% of their earnings on food (Coon, 2008). Already precarious rural livelihoods (due to geographic, economic and political isolation, poor access to markets, limited opportunities for work, low productivity and seasonal and long-term migration) (Coon, 2008) amplified the threat of soaring agricultural prices, which affected not only consumers and urban dwellers but also food producers. The overwhelming majority of small-scale farmers are also net food purchasers, with very high exposure to price increases (Murphy and Schiavoni, 2017). In theory, higher prices offered opportunities to farmers who are net food sellers, but price increases for agricultural inputs (fertilizers, fuel etc.) offset this possibility (Quisumbing et al., 2011).

^f According to Baltzer (2013), ‘Much of this variation [in the price transmission patterns] can be explained by price stabilization policies, public policy failure, incomplete market integration, and coinciding domestic shocks.’

2.2.1 Women smallholder farmers have been disproportionately affected

Because gender inequalities remain very strong in agriculture, women farmers are particularly at risk of food insecurity, especially in times of crisis (FAO, 2016).

2.2.1.1 Women farmers face multilevel discrimination

Rural women account for one in four people on earth and on average for nearly half the agricultural labor force in developing countries (FAO, 2017a). Women play crucial food-security roles, which include farming, food processing, marketing and ensuring household consumption and nutrition (FAO, 2011a). Nevertheless:

- They face discrimination and frequently are in a weak bargaining position. In addition, other forms of discrimination (based on, e.g., race, class, caste or religion) often intersectionally reinforce gender inequality (UN Women, 2014).
- The diminished state role in agriculture in the 1980s and 1990s added to female farmers' marginalization, as it reduced their access to inputs, resources and services (UN Women, 2014). Rural women also face unequal power relations within both the household and wider society, which have impacts on many aspects of food security.
 - At the level of society: social inequalities come from socially constructed barriers to accessing productive and financial resources that also hinder social participation and political representation. Patriarchal norms leading to power imbalances between women and men create disadvantages for women in agriculture, specifically in land rights (small plots, difficulties accessing ownership, discriminatory inheritance rights), productive resources (no access to credit markets, extension services or inputs), unpaid work, insecure employment and low levels of participation in decision making (Sexsmith et al., 2017).
 - In the household: cultural practices and intra-household bargaining power can also determine the allocation of household incomes to food and care needs. Women's weaker position within the family and social standards that favor boys over girls lead to poorer nutrition among women and girls (FAO, 2011a; Lourme-Ruiz et al., 2016).

2.2.1.2 The challenges already facing women smallholder farmers were exacerbated by the food price crisis

Even though there is as yet inadequate research on the gender differentiated impacts of the food price crisis, it is clear that women bore the brunt of it and

came under the most pressure to cope with its effects (Quisumbing et al., 2011). As Hossain and Green (2011) have observed:

The effects differ by gender...women come under more pressure to provide good meals with less food, and feel the stresses of coping with their children's hunger most directly. These stresses push women into poorly paid informal sector work, competing among themselves for ever more inadequate earnings.

The crisis really was a matter of inequalities in achieving the right to adequate food and nutrition, and the short-term factors involved in it exacerbated all the gendered dynamics of the food system (UN Women, 2014). Discrimination against women at these different levels affects their capacity to respond to shocks and cope with food crises (FAO, 2014; UN Women, 2014).

Because of the constraints they face in accessing extension services and financial and agricultural resources, limited legal benefits and protection, heavy time burdens and limited decision-making power, women have fewer options for overcoming any crisis and face more risks than men of losing their assets or formal sector jobs. Price spikes have particularly negative effects on women heads of household, for several reasons: they suffer labor market discrimination, which confines them to informal, vulnerable and casual employment; they often receive less pay than men doing the same work and they usually spend a higher share of their income on food than male household heads (Holmes et al., 2009).

When looking at intra-household dynamics, it is crucial to highlight women's food-security roles: they usually have the primary responsibility for procuring and preparing food within the household (Ford, 2013). With regard to nutrition, they play an important role in providing dietary diversity through their vegetable gardens (which are often not considered "agriculture"), and also because they grow a large share of the cereal or root crops that the household consumes (Doss et al., 2018). During 1970–95, improvements in women's education and social status accounted for more than 50% of the substantial reductions in child malnutrition that occurred (Smith and Haddad, 2000⁸).

In times of crisis, poor rural households face losses in assets, productivity and income. Men use their income to pay past debt and seek new farm production loans. When women's intra-household bargaining position is weak,

⁸ Here is the methodology used: 'IFPRI...examined the factors that helped reduce child malnutrition by 15% in the developing world between 1970 and 1995. The evidence shows that increases in women's education accounted for 43% of the total reduction in child malnutrition, by far the largest contribution. Improvements in women's status accounted for another 12%. Improvements in food availability came in a distant second to women's education, contributing 26% to the rate of reduction.'

the frequent result is less spending on nutrition and children's wellbeing. Indeed, when poor households face a decline in food purchasing power, their coping strategies often include buying cheaper items and moving to less diverse diets, depriving pregnant and nursing women and young children of essential nutrients (Holmes et al., 2009).

Women often turn to extreme coping strategies: reducing their food consumption to make more available to others in the family (Quisumbing et al., 2011), collecting wild food or even migrating in distress or selling assets (Holmes et al., 2009). During the 2012 food crisis in Chad, Khadija Khazali, a widow with seven children from Azoza village, said, "We have reduced the number of meals daily, and women are digging in anthills to recover grains—a practice which our community has not had to resort to for a very long time" (Ford, 2013). Women may also take unsafe jobs to boost their incomes, at the expense of their own security and health, e.g. working in mines (Quisumbing et al., 2011) or going into prostitution (Cohen and Smale, 2011a).

Men have more access to social capital and have more pathways out of a crisis, whereas women often face severe time burdens, given the pressure on them to ensure the household's food security. Therefore they do not enjoy the same opportunities (Ford, 2013). Men can migrate more easily to find a job in urban areas, and this affects the coping capacity of the women who are left behind: they now must manage the family farm, but may still have to get approval from their absent husbands on key agricultural decisions (Coon, 2008).



3. How effective was the global response in tackling the structural causes of the crisis?

3.1 The global response after 2007–08

3.1.1 Putting food security back on the political front burner

The crisis and the subsequent media coverage created an opportunity to put food and agriculture back at the core of global development policies, following years of neglect. After 2007–08 there was a flurry of action, from countries and regions on the front line of the crisis to ODA, multilateral initiatives for reinvestment in agriculture and intergovernmental action, to elevate the place of food security on the global policy agenda.

As noted in Table 1, in the first years following the crisis the global policy responses and funding commitments focused on macro-level relief such as support for production, food aid and preventing export bans (Quisumbing et al., 2011).

Table 1 Initiatives responding to the food price crisis, 2007–12.

What	Who	When	Issues tackled	Initial commitment/pledge
Initiative on Soaring Food Prices (FAO, 2008)	FAO	Late 2007	Food production Agricultural policy support	\$1.7 billion for 58 countries. To help vulnerable countries improve their food production and to provide policy support to improve food access.
Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA) (High-Level Taskforce, 2008)	Produced by a group of 22 international organizations for the High-Level Conference on World Food Security, attended by over 40 heads of state. This was the first international response to the food price crisis	April 2008 Revised 2010	Food aid, cash social protection Short- and long-term agricultural investments	Additional \$25bn–\$40bn per year for food aid and ODA to agriculture and social protection. 10% of international aid to go to agriculture for the next 5 years.
Global Food Crisis Response Program (GFRP) (World Bank, 2013)	World Bank	May 2008	Financial assistance	\$1.2bn for financial assistance and policy and technical advice to severely affected low-income countries.
Purchase for Progress (P4P) (WFP, 2015)	World Food Programme	2008	Food aid	To provide market opportunities to smallholders. To purchase 40,000 tons of food to feed 250,000 people in 2008.
Hokkaido, Japan Summit (G8, 2008)	G8 countries	2008	Food stocks and export restrictions	No commitments, just recommendations for countries to release food stocks and end export restrictions.

Continued

Table 1 Initiatives responding to the food price crisis, 2007–12.—cont'd

What	Who	When	Issues tackled	Initial commitment/pledge
Food Facility (Mayrhofer and Saarinen, 2017)	European Union	December 2008	Food aid and agricultural investments	\$1bn to fill the gap between emergency assistance and medium- to long-term ODA, focusing on smallholders. Committed to a rights-based approach to support small-scale food producers, gender mainstreaming and ecological sustainability.
US presidential initiative (became Feed the Future in 2010) (Muñoz and Tumusiime, 2015)	US	2009–10	Agricultural investments Improved child nutrition Empowering female farmers	\$3.5bn to support agricultural development and food security over 3 years up to 2012; about \$1bn annually since then.
L'Aquila, Italy Summit (G8, 2009)	G8 countries	2009	Agricultural investments	\$22bn over 3 years.
Reform of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) (FAO, 2011b)	CFS member states	2009	Foremost inclusive policy coordination and convergence platform on food security and nutrition Progressive realization of the right to adequate food	Develop a Global Strategic Framework (GSF) and appoint a High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE). Conduct research and provide policy guidance and recommendations on important issues, including high prices and volatility, large-scale land acquisitions, climate change, social protection, women's empowerment in agriculture and investment in smallholder farming.

Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) (GAFSP, 2018)	Multilateral coordination of donors, with World Bank as trustee	2010	Agricultural investments	Initial pledge of \$925m. To pool development assistance resources and use a common framework to selectively allocate resources to where they are most needed, effective and catalytic, in line with country priorities and private sector opportunities.
Agricultural Action Plan (World Bank, 2009b)	World Bank	2010	Agricultural investments	Increase annual funding from \$4.1bn to \$6.2bn–\$8.3bn. Seek to implement the World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development.
Agricultural Marketing Information System (AMIS) (FAO, 2017b)	G20 countries plus Spain, Egypt, Nigeria, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines	2011	Market transparency	Collect, analyse and disseminate food market information.
GROW Africa (GROW Africa, 2017)	World Economic Forum	2011	Agricultural direct investments (public–private partnerships, or PPPs)	Link African countries with private investors.
New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition in Africa (European Union Directorate General for External Policies, 2015)	G8 countries	2012	Agricultural direct investments (PPPs)	Help 50 million Africans get out of poverty by 2022.

Source: Authors' analysis; specific sources for each initiative indicated in the relevant row.

The FAO was the first institution to react, establishing the Initiative on Soaring Food Prices in December 2007, with a budget of \$1.7bn. This provided 58 countries with technical advice through FAO's *Guide for Policy and Programmatic Actions at Country Level to Address High Food Prices* (Maetz et al., 2011). Then in April 2008 World Bank President Robert Zoellick pushed for a "New Deal for a Global Food Policy" and established the Global Food Crisis Response Program (GFRP), with a view to the "expedited processing" of assistance and an initial budget of \$1.2bn. Similar to FAO's initiative, the GFRP provided technical and policy advice to severely affected, low-income countries (World Bank, 2013).

The first coordinated international response was the High-Level Conference on World Food Security, held in Rome in June 2008 and attended by over 40 heads of state from the Global South and North. A group of 22 international organizations produced the Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA), which was launched at the conference; this called for an additional \$25bn–\$40bn per year for food aid and ODA for agriculture and social protection, and advocated allocating 10% of international aid to agriculture for the next 5 years. The conference resulted in greater collaboration among the Rome-based UN food and agriculture agencies, but it also led to greater fragmentation of food-related international institutions as yet more new ones were created. Then the World Summit on Food Security in Rome in November 2009 agreed to the Rome Principles for Sustainable Global Food Security, which called for better coordination and more stable funding (FAO, 2009c). Both the Group of 8 (G8) "leading" countries and the larger Group of 20 (G20) then agreed to food security initiatives, including at every annual G8/G7 Summit meeting from 2008 to 2010. At the 2009 G8 Summit in L'Aquila, Italy member governments pledged \$22bn, but it turned out that a large part of this consisted of recycled promises or even money previously spent.

In September 2009 the Pittsburgh G20 Summit asked the World Bank "to work with interested donors and organizations to develop a multilateral trust fund to scale-up agricultural assistance to low-income countries" (G20 Information Centre, 2009). The resulting Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) (World Bank, 2009a) currently is providing \$1.4bn to 41 countries through two windows: one focused on supporting public sector action in developing countries, and the other providing loans, guarantees and equity to the private sector to support investment in agricultural development (GAFSP, 2020).

Following the second spike of the crisis in 2011, there was an additional set of global responses. This time there was a greater focus on long-term agricultural investments, especially through partnerships with other actors like the private sector, whereas in 2008–10 the response was mainly through the public sector.

Reflecting on the policy responses to soaring food prices, [de Schutter \(2011\)](#) commented:

Today, too many [governments] continue to see hunger as a problem of supply and demand, when it is primarily a problem of a lack of access to productive resources such as land and water, of unscrupulous employers and traders, of an increasingly concentrated input providers sector, and of insufficient safety nets to support the poor. Too much attention has been paid to addressing the mismatch between supply and demand on the international markets [...] while comparatively too little attention has been paid both to the imbalances of power in the food systems and to the failure to support the ability of small-scale farmers to feed themselves, their families, and their communities.

3.2 Responding to the crisis with business as usual

3.2.1 Addressing supply and demand factors: Increasing productivity as a major solution, but neglecting the issue of marginalization

The marginalization of whole segments of the population in attaining food security and nutrition throughout the food price crisis made it clear that the main issues were access and inequality, rather than food production. However, the policy discussion tended to focus on the need to double production, both to dampen short-term price increases and also to meet projected population growth through to 2050. Efforts and plans tended to focus on this perceived need for increased production, even though supplies were already in substantial surplus ([Bricas and Goïta, 2018](#)).

3.2.1.1 Global policy response

Between June 2008 and July 2009, WFP provided short-term food aid valued at \$5.1bn, nearly double the \$2.78bn in agricultural aid mobilized by the World Bank, FAO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) ([Brock and Paasch, 2009](#)). WFP's big fundraising push sought to compensate for the effects of rising food prices on its ability to procure commodities ([Golay, 2010](#)), but in fact global food aid volumes in 2007–12 were below those of 2001–06, as a direct result of the 2008 and 2011 price spikes ([Brock and Paasch, 2009](#)).

Although some of the early initiatives did provide resources to smallholder agriculture, not all smallholders benefitted equally. Thus, these

programs fell short on delivering fully on the promise that smallholder-led agricultural development was back prominently on the development agenda. For example, an ActionAid assessment showed that GAFSP projects successfully targeted small-scale food producers. Some projects emphasized women's empowerment, through income-generating opportunities for women and strengthening women's organizations. However, the study also pointed out that women were not adequately consulted in project design and activity planning, and their under-representation prevented them from receiving information about projects (ActionAid, 2016).

In addition, much of the funding provided to address the crisis aimed to promote the growth of productivity in staple grains. This was true of the majority of grants from GAFSP and the US Feed the Future (FTF) program for example, with much less attention paid to horticulture crops (Pingali, 2015), even though horticulture production had the potential to boost the livelihoods and food security of smallholders, including women farmers (Ulrich, 2014).

As Table 2 shows, targeting women was not a priority for most of the initiatives that sought to address the food price crisis. For those that did aim to make gender equality a high priority, such as the CFA, the GAFSP and FTF, the impacts were limited because these initiatives focused on enhancing the productivity of "market-ready" farmers, who frequently tend to be male. Although the CFS champions tackling gender inequalities in food security and nutrition, some member states have sought to weaken it over the past decades, leaving it with less influence.

3.2.1.2 Tackling market failures

The G20 responded to the price spikes by encouraging the development of the Agricultural Marketing Information System (AMIS). This initiative seeks more transparent commodity markets and information exchange among producer and consumer countries. However, AMIS has no control over many of the drivers of price volatility, and it is not able to monitor privately held stocks (e.g., those of grain traders) (Murphy and Schiavoni, 2017). Equally, it cannot tackle all the major market failures that lay behind the crisis. Global policy makers largely failed to enact needed reforms to financial markets to prevent destabilizing speculation in commodity markets, due to pressure from industry lobbyists to maintain the status quo (see, for example, Fang, 2015).

The High-Level Conference on World Food Security in 2008, the 2009 G8 Summit and the 2009 World Food Summit all pointed to the potential

Table 2 Attention to gender issues in initiatives undertake to tackle the food price crisis.
What **Gender focus?**

Initiative on Soaring Food Prices	No mention of gender inequalities or specific focus on women in the guide.
Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA)	Recognizes the disadvantages that women face in the food price crisis and their disproportionate vulnerability, especially to the long-term effects. The “menu of actions” recommends that “channeling food assistance via women should be encouraged and opportunities to improve program efficiency should be pursued.”
Global Food Crisis Response Program (GFRP)	No information found.
Purchase for Progress (P4P)	Takes a “gender transformative approach, directly focusing on women to ensure that they benefit from the project source.”
Hokkaido, Japan G8 Summit	No mention of gender inequalities.
EU Food Facility	Committed to a rights-based approach to support small-scale food producers, gender mainstreaming and ecological sustainability.
Feed the Future	The USAID Forward policy framework and the Feed the Future Guide, which support FTF operations, emphasize gender equality. The policy framework seeks to ensure women’s engagement throughout the project cycle. The Guide makes gender a cross-cutting priority, and aims to recognize women’s often unsung contributions in agriculture, rights to resources and needs as food producers.
L’Aquila, Italy G8 Summit	Only one mention of women farmers as food security actors.
Reform of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)	Makes “Gender, Food Security and Nutrition” a pillar of CFS work. The Committee urged member states to undertake policy reforms to ensure gender equality in achieving the right to adequate food and nutrition, and to include women in food security decision making at all levels. It also asked member states to produce gender-disaggregated data.

Continued

Table 2 Attention to gender issues in initiatives undertake to tackle the food price crisis.—cont'd

What	Gender focus?
GAFSP	Directly supports achievement of SDG 5, encouraging gender equality. Beyond increasing productivity and linking farmers to markets, GAFSP's sustainable agriculture interventions have an impact on gender equality issues, such as women's agricultural empowerment, job creation on and off the farm and the enhancement of women's and girls' nutritional status.
Agricultural Action Plan	Mostly gender-blind, with a single "add women and stir" line in the action plan: "Focus on the ultimate client, especially women."
Agricultural Marketing Information System (AMIS)	Gender-blind: does not address gender issues, and evaluated by FAO as "neutral" on gender, with no specific gender component or strategy.
Grow Africa	No mention of gender.
New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition in Africa	Weak on the recognition of women's rights and women's empowerment.

Source: Authors' analysis; see [Table 1](#) for specific sources for each initiative.

role that food reserves could play in the international response to the crisis ([Gubbels, 2011](#)). In the early 2000s, under pressure from the international financial institutions due to the high cost, many developing country governments had abandoned the use of food stocks to counter physical shortages or reduce price fluctuations (see, for example, [Devereux, 2002](#)). But as prices rose in 2007–08, some countries sought to collaborate on a regional basis to create reserves to dampen the effects: new regional stocking systems were set up in West Africa by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and in Southeast Asia by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) ([Lines, 2011](#)).

3.2.1.3 National responses

Many governments reacted to the crisis, sometimes without efforts to coordinate their actions. However, many low-income, food-importing countries had limited capacity to respond ([Golay, 2010](#)) and they also suffered impacts from the actions of other countries, such as export bans.

In West Africa in 2008 the majority of states lowered tariffs and taxes on some cereals, and some decided to control their domestic prices. Although such measures can ease the food price burden on consumers, including politically restive urban populations, they cannot ensure efficiency and sustainability or target all vulnerable people, and may be very costly to maintain (Cohen and Smale, 2011b; Hathie, 2018).

Most of the programs implemented after the crisis only targeted cereal production to reach national sufficiency and did not target other segments of the value chain. This strategy was conducted through National Agricultural Investment Plans (NAIPs), which originally were meant to tackle structural constraints and encourage sustainable agricultural growth as part of national development planning processes but which led to dependency on input subsidies and created a higher dependence on external markets (Hathie, 2018).

FAO examined the measures taken in more than 80 countries from 2008 to 2010, and found that policy decisions paralleled those of 2007–08 (Fig. 8) (see also Maetz et al., 2011). These measures included support for farmers' access to inputs and facilitating access to credit.

Countries carrying out policy actions (%)

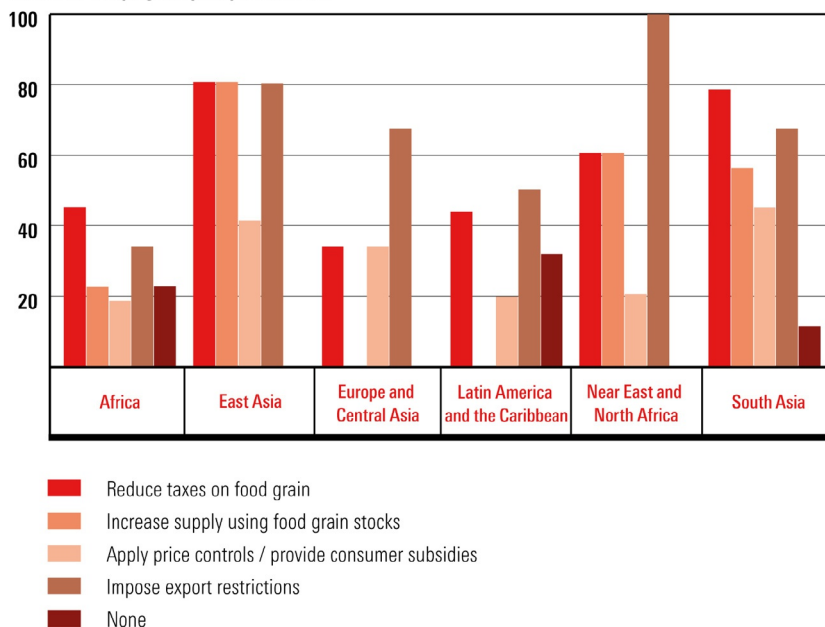


Fig. 8 Policy actions taken to tackle the crisis, by region. Source: FAO, 2008. *The State of Food Insecurity in the World (SOFI) 2008: High Food Prices and Food Security—Threats and Opportunities*. Rome: FAO. <http://www.fao.org/3/i0291e/i0291e00.pdf>.

However, such policies do not necessarily favor smallholder production, and many of the policies that on paper targeted small-scale producers excluded those considered to be nonviable economically, leaving many out (Wise and Murphy, 2012). Moreover, some of the policies emphasized inclusion of small-holders in export value chains without evaluating the environmental and economic risks (Wise and Murphy, 2012). Such policies often had disastrous impacts on small-scale farmers, especially on women farmers who relied on production of non-staple crops. These are key sources of micronutrients, but were crowded out by efforts to promote staple production with fertilizer and credit subsidies and price supports. In many instances, this led to increased prices for non-staples, such as fruit and vegetables (Pingali, 2015).

3.2.1.4 Structural factors were ignored or exacerbated

3.2.1.4.1 Liberalization of agricultural trade Trade-oriented measures evolved as a medium-term trend. Some exporting countries still observed export restrictions after 2008 to keep their domestic prices low but several countries, in contrast, put in place export facilitation measures (Maetz et al., 2011).^h In addition, some governments lowered tariffs on imported food in order to improve food access (Maetz et al., 2011).

Overall, the policy responses did not reverse the direction of global agricultural trade liberalization. Governments continued to reduce agricultural tariffs, and many offered preferential market access via bilateral agreements. World agricultural trade grew an average of 3.5% per year during the two decades following enactment of the WTO Agreement on Agriculture, i.e., 1995–2014 (Beckman et al., 2017).

3.2.1.4.2 Acquisition of large tracts of land and biofuel policies One consequence of the food price crisis was a scramble to gain control of large tracts of land in developing countries. Wealthy-country governments and private companies acquired much of the land in question. Between 2012 and 2016, the five leading investor countries were Malaysia, Singapore, Cyprus, the United Kingdom and China (GRAIN, 2008; Nolte et al., 2016). Large-scale land acquisitions (in excess of 200 hectares) often dispossessed smallholders (Geary, 2012; Wise and Murphy, 2012). In most instances, these investments focused on export production rather than growing food

^h These countries included Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador and Paraguay in South America, Syria and Yemen in the Middle East and Asian nations including China, Pakistan and Thailand, as well as India to some extent. Countries limiting exports included Cambodia, China, India, Pakistan and Vietnam.

crops for local consumption, often with little regard to environmental consequences (Geary, 2012). Two-thirds of these acquisitions occurred in countries facing significant food insecurity (Geary, 2012). Usually, investors sought to acquire land in order to produce biofuel crops such as sugarcane, soy and jatropha for export (Geary, 2012).

Meanwhile, biofuels policies in rich countries remain largely unchanged. The United States, the main producer of maize-based ethanol, continues to require the blending of ethanol into petrol (Bracmort, 2019). Legislative work to install a ceiling on the share of biofuels coming from food crops has continued at the EU level over the past decade. However, the EU's Renewable Energy Directive (RED II) of 2018 still allows member states to burn massive amounts of food as fuel (Oxfam International, 2018).

3.2.1.4.3 National public investments in agriculture continue to fall short Food security and agriculture also gained regional and national policy salience after the food price crisis. For example, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) (see Box 1),

BOX 1 CAADP.

The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) (AU, 2003a) seeks to promote agricultural development, food security and good nutrition on the continent. It was endorsed at the AU's Summit Meeting under the Maputo Declaration in 2003 (AU, 2003b). From the start, it grabbed headlines by setting a target for every African government to devote a minimum of 10% of its budget to agriculture.

The Program is intended to end a long-ingrained habit of dependence on external resources. As a 2010 Oxfam report noted, "International aid has long represented the bulk of agricultural sector financing in many West African countries. In 2008, it accounted for 75% of the domestic agriculture budget of Niger [and] over 60% in Ghana...." (Guereña, 2010). ODA remains a key source of finance for Burkina Faso's agriculture budget.¹

This situation has led the work of governments in unusual directions. Thus, "National agriculture co-ordination bodies do exist..., but they serve more to exchange information than to actually co-ordinate interventions on the ground" (Guereña, 2010). By 2010 agriculture's share of public expenditure by African governments was just 3.9%, although the share differed greatly from country to

Continued

¹ The authors are grateful to Issaka Ouandaogo at Oxfam in Burkina Faso for information on reliance on aid for agriculture financing in Burkina Faso.

BOX 1 CAADP.—cont'd

country. Only 10 of 47 African countries met or exceeded the 10% Maputo target (Anisimova, 2016), and few have done so consistently.

The AU agreed to a new Agenda 2063 in 2013, marking 50 years since the foundation of the Organisation of African Unity. Its Call to Action for the next 50 years included the following among its targets for African agriculture and agro-businesses by the time of the 100th anniversary:

- Achieve zero hunger;
- Lower food imports while boosting intra-Africa food and agricultural trade to 50% of total agricultural trade; and
- Increase women's access to land and agricultural inputs, and allocate at least 30% of agricultural finance to women (AU, 2013).

One year later in 2014, the Malabo Declaration introduced a system of biennial reviews of countries' achievements under CAADP (AU, 2014). The first review, covering 2015 and 2016, found that AU members' expenditure on agriculture ranged from 0.6% to 17.6% of their budgets. Ten countries met the 10% target, but this was no more than in 2010, when the star performers were Zimbabwe, Malawi and Ethiopia. However, Malawi had fallen back from 28.9% in 2010 to 17.6%, Ethiopia to 16.8% and Zimbabwe to 6.0% (AU, 2018).

There are concerns that the review process is excessively "state-centric." Popular narratives dwell on the argument that if the review process is there to ensure accountability, it must provide for inclusivity and the participation of all stakeholders.^j

Indeed, the CAADP framework remains very weak in terms of gender inclusion: the only CAADP commitment related to gender is about women's involvement in agribusiness. In other words, the CAADP commitments themselves are largely gender-blind. And although the technical guidance of CAADP asks countries to collect gender-disaggregated data, there is minimal reporting on how women smallholder farmers are progressing under these commitments.

whose commitments for financing the agricultural sector made at the Maputo summit in 2003 predated the food crisis, became more relevant after the price spikes (Wise and Murphy, 2012). However, although the African Union's (AU) member states agreed to a target of allocating 10% of their budgets to agriculture (a pledge reaffirmed at the Malabo summit in 2014), the continental average in 2017 was still less than a quarter of that level, at 2.3% (FAO, 2019b). Meanwhile, on average, sub-Saharan African governments devoted

^j The authors are grateful to Alvin Munyasia at the Oxfam Pan Africa office for these observations.

5.9% of their expenditures that year to the military (World Bank, 2020), despite the role played by conflict in increasing hunger in the region.

Despite renewed policy attention to agriculture, current public investment levels remain woefully inadequate. The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) estimates an annual investment gap in developing country agriculture of \$260bn over the period 2015–30 (out of a total annual SDG financing gap of \$2.5 trillion) (UNCTAD, 2014).

An analysis of national government and aid donor investments in Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines and Tanzania was unable to trace the flow of funds to women farmers. It found diversion of resources away from smallholders, and a lack of government capacity to ensure support for small-scale producers (either men or women) (Mayrhofer and Saarinen, 2017).

Social safety nets put in place by governments are often efficient in targeting vulnerable populations; however, their efficiency is limited depending on the objective (e.g., assistance through cash transfers during lean periods) and there are multiple approaches (a short-term approach providing food assistance or long-term approaches aimed at strengthening resilience and fighting poverty). While donors' efforts to target support for social protection programs based on poverty criteria show decent results (Schnitzer, 2016), there could be better inclusion of women by adding gender-specific requirements (e.g., direct inclusion of female heads of household or women with children under the age of five).

Investments in R&D and in infrastructure have often focused on export agriculture and cereals at the expense of food crops oriented toward the consumption of local communities (De Schutter, 2017). The Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research's (CGIAR) R&D expenditures on wheat, maize and rice, for example, more than doubled from \$100m in 2004 to \$228m annually during 2012–14 (Pingali, 2015).

3.2.1.4.4 No major increase in aid to agriculture The share of ODA dedicated to food security and nutrition (FSN) has remained largely constant (Fig. 9^k): OECD data show that this kind of aid grew at the same rate as total ODA, without major increases in response to the food price spikes.

^k We use the same methodology as presented in Mowlds et al. (2012) to calculate gross ODA disbursements for food and nutrition security (FNS). We therefore consider all aid reported under agriculture, agro-industries, forestry, fishing, nutrition and development food aid/food security assistance as being aid for FNS. While this approach will include some aid that is not specifically targeted to FNS and will also exclude some that is, we feel that in the absence of a specific FNS classification it provides a reasonable picture of trends in aid in this area.

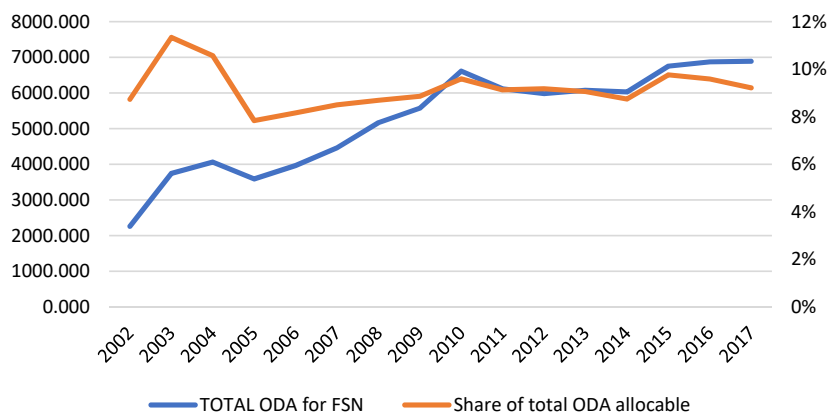


Fig. 9 ODA for FSN (DAC donors only), gross disbursements, 2016 USD. *Source: Authors' calculations from OECD, 2020. OECD.Stat Database. <https://stats.oecd.org/OECD-DAC/CRS>, gross disbursements, constant 2016 USD.*

Although the \$22bn pledge made in L'Aquila in 2009 did lead to additional ODA resources for agriculture, the increase in funds for FSN was modest, as less than one-third of the pledges (\$6.1bn) represented additional money above spending that donors had already planned. Also, the funds promised at L'Aquila were one-time pledges, not multiyear commitments of additional money (Mowlds et al., 2012; Wise and Murphy, 2012). As the global economy fell into recession in the second half of 2008, donors turned to austerity measures that limited ODA increases (Wise and Murphy, 2012).

Analyzing two major donors, the EU and the US, over a period of 10 years shows that they are far from delivering. Smallholders are central to the EU's international food security policy (EC, 2010) and its \$1bn Food Facility, launched in 2009, had a specific focus on small-scale producers. However, Mayrhofer and Saarinen (2017) found that less than one-quarter of EU aid for agriculture between 2007 and 2015 explicitly targeted small-scale producers. Only 2%–3% of EU agricultural funding promoted gender equality, and there was little attention to environmental sustainability. Furthermore, with the exception of just 1 year (2009 due to the Food Facility), the EU's agricultural ODA has consistently supported industrial and export crops with significantly higher budgets than food crops. The destination of ODA can also contradict aid effectiveness principles when it does not match policy commitments. In contrast with the EU commitment to target a substantial share of its aid to Africa, ODA for agricultural

development declined considerably in the aftermath of the emergency response led by the Food Facility. Conversely, flows to ODA recipients based in Europe have grown 10-fold since 2009, making European ODA recipient countries the largest recipients of EU agricultural ODA (see Fig. 10).

The US created a 3-year, \$3.5bn agriculture, food security and nutrition initiative, Feed the Future (FTF), after L'Aquila. Since 2012, the program has continued with funding of about \$1bn annually. FTF has attempted to integrate the principles of aid effectiveness, particularly country ownership, into its programming, along with women's empowerment and sustainable natural resource management. Its main emphasis is on working with "market-ready" smallholders who have high potential to engage in commercial agriculture, often however at the expense of farmers who have the least access to resources (land, labor, capital). Also, the focus is more often on approaches to yield gains that require high levels of external inputs. The gains have been impressive: farm outputs in FTF focus countries over the period 2008–14 exceeded those of other low- and low-middle-income countries by \$42bn (Feed the Future, 2017). However, it is not clear whether these gains are sustainable once US aid ends. There also appears to be a real trade-off between aligning aid with national development plans

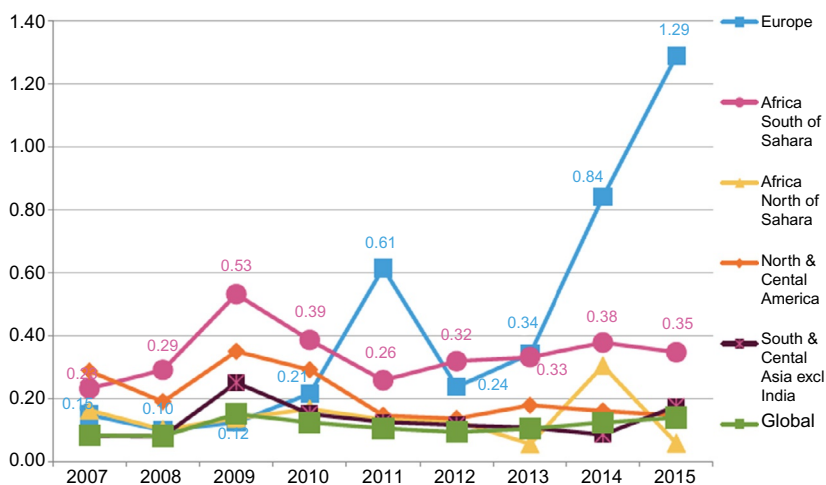


Fig. 10 EU ODA disbursements for agriculture per capita, by region (€ millions). Source: Mayrhofer, J, Saarinen, H., 2017. *Missing out on small is beautiful: the EU's failure to deliver on policy commitments to support smallholder agriculture in developing countries*. Oxfam Briefing Paper. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/missing-out-on-small-is-beautiful-the-eus-failure-to-deliv-er-on-policy-commitme-620288>.

on the one hand and some other aspects of country ownership on the other, such as broad consultation with stakeholders and provision of resources through local systems and actors (Muñoz and Tumusiime, 2015).

3.2.1.4.5 Growing role for multinational enterprise Since the food price crisis, global policy has given more space to the private sector: for instance, the G8 launched its New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition in Africa in May 2012, with a goal of “unleashing the potential of the private sector.”

Developing country governments, bilateral and multilateral aid agencies, and multinational firms have all joined in promoting private investment in agriculture in the Global South. But there is a big risk that this emphasis will bypass smallholder farmers (see Box 2).

The G8 launched the New Alliance on the eve of its Camp David meeting in 2012. This initiative represents a major scaling back of public funds provided by G7 countries for global agricultural development, leaving Africa much more reliant on public–private partnerships (PPPs) and private capital. The Alliance has been denounced as “the new colonialism” by some organizations in the region (Provost et al., 2014). The New Alliance has benefited the biggest agribusiness multinationals through legal changes and new investor frameworks in African countries, while family and smallholder farming is to a great extent excluded. Of 213 New Alliance projects, only three are led by producers’ organizations (one each in Burkina Faso, Benin and Malawi). The agricultural model supported resembles that of the Green Revolution of the 1950s and 1960s, i.e., monoculture, mechanization, very heavy dependence on purchased inputs, long distribution channels and production for export. It also puts considerable emphasis on the role of biotechnology. By focusing narrowly on technology-driven productivity gains, this approach misses much of the complexity that underlies hunger, and ignores the ways that the interests of powerful actors affect food and agriculture.

There is evidence that the Alliance has supported the enactment of laws conferring intellectual property rights to plant breeders; this impinges on traditional farming practices such as saving, reusing and trading seeds (Qiu, 2017). A UK government fact sheet on the New Alliance makes no mention of gender or women’s roles in food security (DFID, n.d.), and a New Alliance progress report published in 2014 points out that only 21% of smallholder farmers taking part in New Alliance projects are women (ACF et al., 2014).

BOX 2 Private finance blending—A new trend in aid to agriculture.

A new trend in development finance is private finance (PF) blending: during the past 10 years, donors and international agencies have increasingly sought to engage the private sector in development, using ODA to “leverage” private finance through “blending” the latter with public resources. The data on how much ODA is going into PF blending arrangements remain unclear ([Eurodad, 2017](#)).

Although the absolute figures appear still to be relatively low, it is expected that they will increase rapidly over the coming years. Such a financing mechanism could benefit smallholders in low-income developing countries, including women, by de-risking the provision of credit for on- and off-farm activities. For example, FTF in Ghana has worked with a local financial institution to expand the provision of microcredit in the northern part of the country, which has higher poverty rates than the national average ([Saarinen and Godfrey, 2019](#)).

A study of PF blending programs in agriculture found serious data limitations (both quantitative and qualitative). It concluded that “donors have more work to do to ensure that private finance blending is an effective tool for financing smallholder agriculture and promoting inclusive and sustainable transformation in the sector” ([Saarinen and Godfrey, 2019](#)).

The following broad conclusions have been drawn from a 2017 analysis by Eurodad and Oxfam (which is not specific to agriculture and food security). PF blending poses risks to the quality of aid ([Eurodad, 2017](#)):

- It is less transparent and accountable than other forms of aid.
- Development finance institutions (DFIs) that engage in PF blending often do not operate according to the principles of development effectiveness, particularly country ownership.
- So far, there is inadequate evidence on impacts and inadequate monitoring and evaluation.
- PF blending opens up the possibility of supporting donor-based commercial interests, rather than local smallholders. This increases the risk that it will support tied aid.

Blending also could drain ODA resources from high priority development programs and is unlikely to offer an effective means to finance development in poorer countries or for the poorest farmers. Based on return on investment considerations, PF blending resources tend to go to middle-income countries and are geared toward better-off farmer groups who already have access to resources and knowledge ([Eurodad, 2017](#); see also [Saarinen and Godfrey, 2019](#)).

A recent study by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) reinforces these concerns. It found that, despite donor claims of high leverage ratios, each \$1.00 of blended development finance from multilateral development banks and DFIs in fact leverages just \$0.75 in private finance. The figure falls to \$0.37 for low-income countries ([Attridge and Engen, 2019](#)).

3.2.1.4.6 Climate change Adaptation to climate change is also an issue that needs high-level funding if the world is to reach zero hunger. The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) has found that developing countries' annual adaptation costs could reach \$140bn–\$300bn by 2030 (UNEP, 2014), with much of those costs agriculture-related. Pearl-Martinez (2017) found that adaptation finance still accounts for less than half of all climate finance. Only a very small share is targeted to smallholders; in 2016, the figure was just \$345 m.

3.3 A lack of coherent governance for global food security

The food price crisis of 2007–08 generated a strong reaction and opened the door to civil society and the scientific community to push for a radical transformation of agri-food systems that would take account of environmental, social and health challenges and would promote fairness and sustainability, through balanced governance (Bricas and Goïta, 2018). Despite these opportunities, however, the governance of global food security is under threat and its shake-up after the food price crisis has not led to smooth coordination, coherence or convergence among the multiple stakeholders.

3.3.1 Fragmentation

Multilateralism and global governance are more and more hybrid and fragmented: numerous parallel and overlapping initiatives and platforms deal with food security and operate without coordination. So far, they have not proved able to converge to attain SDG 2 (zero hunger), 5 (gender equality) or 13 (combat the impacts of climate change). Since the food price crisis, the decision-making center has shifted uncertainly between the CFA, the High-Level Task Force on Global Food and Nutrition Security (HLTF), the G8, the G20 and the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), with strong influence from the private sector. The decision-making power of the CFS has been reinforced since its restructuring, but its recommendations to member states remain purely advisory. Paradoxically, food security governance has also been more concentrated among just a few actors since the food price crisis.

After the crisis, we can identify four relevant types of international agency involved in food security governance:

- General political direction: the G8/G7 and the G20. These groupings are powerful as they are dominated by richer countries, include all the main aid donors and can take big decisions at moments of crisis. Even in the more broadly based G20, the representatives of the Global

South are either bigger countries (e.g., Indonesia), members of the BRICS group (e.g., South Africa) or both (e.g., Brazil, China and India). Africa is represented only by South Africa, while small island states, which are extremely vulnerable economically and climatically, are not represented at all.

- Development aid: e.g., WFP, the World Bank, IFAD, USAID, EU institutions, such private foundations as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation and private ventures like the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA). The World Bank and the IMF wield outsized influence on countries through their loans, conditionalities, policy advice and technical assistance, much of which is followed by bilateral aid agencies as well (Eurodad, 2006; Stichelmanns, 2016).
- Sustainable food systems analysis and policy forums: the leading examples are FAO and its Committee on World Food Security (CFS), the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the other international agricultural research centers of the CGIAR. UNCTAD also plays a part.
- Rules with an enforcement mechanism: only the WTO. However, its Dispute Settlement Mechanism is currently in crisis due to a withdrawal of cooperation by the US, which is seen in some quarters as an effort to undermine the organization (Bey, 2018). Other analysts see US obstruction as part of that country's negotiating posture tied to its trade disputes with China, and note that the US continues to win a substantial share of the complaints it brings to the disputes body (Hanke and Von Der Burchard, 2018; Lamy, 2018).

3.3.2 A lack of global coherence

This fragmentation leads to a lack of coordinated policies and coherent governance, with strong competing perspectives.

The UN system has promoted a rights-based approach to food security through the CFS, encouraging the implementation of more holistic tactics to achieve the SDGs, advocating for sustainable food systems and agro-ecology, launching the UN Decade of Family Farming (2019–28) and, in 2018, adopting the UN peasants' rights declaration (UN News, 2018).

On the opposite side, some aid donors have provided short-term responses that have not always been consistent with long-term needs. And in terms of policy, the response to the food price crisis served to reinforce the emphasis on productivity and producing more food “to feed 9 billion by 2050,” failed to address ecological challenges and the rights and practices of small-scale farmers

and practically ignored gender inequalities (Duncan and Margulis, 2016). Increased multinational corporate influence within the governance landscape has resulted in a limited interpretation of sustainability. For example, some global supermarket firms include in their sustainability plans the integration of smallholder farmers into their value chains, including training in sustainable agriculture techniques. At the same time, the growing market power of these firms allows them to enforce production standards within those value chains and to determine contract terms (Barling and Duncan, 2015). Such private power often contradicts and undermines efforts undertaken by civil society actors and some states to promote a rights-based approach to food security (Duncan and Margulis, 2016), and raises accountability questions.

States continue to play a key role in global food security governance across the different platforms of engagement and at multiple scales (Duncan and Margulis, 2016). However, the increased complexity of governance can permit states to pursue contradictory policy goals. They may place food security high on their policy agendas, strongly advocate for it in forums like the G7 or the G20 and provide contributions of aid for agriculture, but at the same time they may try to limit the political influence of the CFS and its multi-stakeholder process, prevent institutionalization of the human right to food as a fundamental principle of food security and pursue aggressive trade liberalization policies vis-à-vis developing countries (Duncan and Margulis, 2016).

3.3.3 A leadership crisis

The body that was supposed to give general political direction is the CFS, which was reformed in the wake of the food price crisis to be a broad, multi-stakeholder platform for food security governance, incorporating civil society organizations, in particular organizations and movements of the people seriously affected by hunger and undernutrition, as part of the decision-making procedures with the status of empowered (though non-voting) participants (McKeon, 2018). This process is facilitated through the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSM). Member states remain the principal decision makers and accountable stakeholders (McKeon, 2018). This structural reform qualifies as a significant effort to address the underlying causes of the food crisis. However, the CFS faces a multitude of challenges, despite evaluations that find its work positive and pertinent; this is symptomatic of a global contraction of civil-society space in all governance platforms. The challenges concern (McKeon, 2018):

- The actors—some governments do not wish to be held accountable; big corporate actors seek a privileged place at the expense of smallholders and civil society organizations (CSOs).
- The process—some states favor technical and institutional solutions that privilege investments over public policies and make extra use of their red lines to prohibit discussion of certain topics.
- The finances—inadequate funding of the platform constrains its potential.
- The content—the agenda is overly influenced or controlled by a few states with strong vested interests in expanding current agriculture models while civil society voices and farmers organizations are marginalized. It took the CSM several years to bring agro-ecology before the CFS, and debate on contentious questions such as food sovereignty, climate change, biofuels and the food and nutrition impacts of international trade liberalization remain taboo.

In contrast, the G20 expanded its area of influence after the food price crisis, seeking to coordinate the global response. The G20 Action Plan did not address the root causes of the problem, however, and AU countries criticized it for fostering continuing dependence on food imports in an era of volatile global prices. These countries demanded policies to support food self-reliance (Wise and Murphy, 2012). The G20 includes the governments of some of the world's wealthiest and most powerful countries, as well as those of middle-income and developing countries that have no mandate to speak for other countries. This arrangement poses a problem of legitimacy, especially when the countries representing the Global South in the group are major net food exporters, such as Brazil (Wise and Murphy, 2012).

3.3.4 The emergence of the private sector as a new actor with a new vision: Challenges and perspectives

Since the food price crisis the private sector, another key player, has acquired increasing influence over food security governance, adding another layer of complexity to the panorama of actors and decision making. The rhetoric of mobilizing “billions to trillions” to finance achievement of the SDGs (World Bank, 2015) elevates the private sector and private finance to an ever more privileged position.

A 2016 analysis examined the key elements of the growing influence of agri-food multinationals in discussions on the fight against hunger at a governance level (ACF et al., 2016):

- Companies have directly launched or financed initiatives (as can be seen in the role of the Norwegian agricultural chemical firm Yara in the

proliferation of agricultural growth corridors from 2008 onwards), as have corporate philanthropic bodies. For example, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation established AGRA in 2006.

- Beginning in the 2000s, seed and agri-chemical giants such as Monsanto and Syngenta (now owned by Bayer and ChemChina, respectively) established or ramped up their philanthropic arms to engage in advocacy in international forums, including the CFS, as well as in discussions on trade and the environment.
- Multinational firms have proved influential in development discussions through their corporate social responsibility activities. Their public relations efforts highlight the convergence of corporate and government interests and priorities. A good example is the food company Nestlé's decade-long emphasis on "creating shared value" which, according to the firm, reflects "our ongoing commitment to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals...." (Nestlé, 2020).
- Undertakings such as the New Alliance and Grow Africa seek to mobilize private funds to overcome public sector disinvestment in the agricultural sector in developing countries. Donors have established these entities to offer the private sector vehicles to promote their approaches, technologies and policy prescriptions.

Large philanthropies such as the Rockefeller Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in particular have a great deal of financial clout: between 2013 and 2015 private foundations spent \$1.9bn on agricultural development, and 70% of these funds went to Africa. Over the same period, private foundations spent \$7.7bn on agricultural research, primarily on inputs and specifically seeds (mainly hybrids and genetically modified organisms (GMOs)) (Inter-réseaux, 2018). Their financial clout and investment mean that they exert influence over the agricultural models that developing countries adopt. Organizations that have received substantial foundation funding, such as AGRA, have sought to shape the design of policies in Africa: in Ghana, the AGRA working group on seeds drafted corporate-oriented amendments to the national seed policy that were submitted to the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (Inter-réseaux, 2018).

As the influence of private sector actors in food security policy has grown, it has tended to overwhelm that of small and family-owned business. Corporate actors usually promote technological approaches to development, including high-external-input agriculture, and generally steer clear

of any holistic rights-based approach. Multinational firms also structure their own governance along top-down lines, leaving out farmers' organizations, organizations of rural women and women's rights organizations, national private sectors and civil society in general ([Inter-réseaux, 2018](#)).



4. Addressing women's food insecurity in a (more) unstable and broken food system

4.1 Increased challenges for food and nutrition security for women

The lack of progress on realization of the right to adequate food for all—and specifically for women smallholder farmers—and thus on achieving SDG 2 by 2030 results from instability in the factors that contribute to achieving food security, and this has led to food price volatility. All this is largely the consequence of gender-blind political choices that have failed to tackle the broken agri-food system. Twelve years after the 2007–08 food price spike, the main structural factors that marginalized women smallholder farmers have still not been addressed and the most likely food security scenarios do not seem to have become any more optimistic.

According to the 2020 UN report on the *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* (SOFI 2020), the number of hungry people globally rose by 10 million in 2019 and by 60 million over a 5-year period. Looking at food insecurity thorough a different optic, the report also found that more than 3 billion people (38.3% of the world's population) cannot afford a healthy diet ([FAO et al., 2020](#)). The number of people facing acute food insecurity rose to 135 million in 2019 ([FSIN, 2020](#)). The number of African countries relying on external food aid rose from 20 in 2009 to 31 in 2019 ([Caramel, 2019](#)).

Early projections of the effects of the coronavirus pandemic suggest that it will have catastrophic food security consequences. SOFI 2020 reports that COVID-19 could add 83 million–132 million people to the ranks of the hungry, depending on the depth and duration of the resulting global recession ([FAO et al., 2020](#)).

The virus, combined with insecurity, extreme weather, desert locusts and economic instability will likely contribute to increased acute food insecurity as well ([FSIN, 2020](#)). Violent conflict is the key factor in the severe food crises in South Sudan and Yemen ([FSIN, 2020](#)). According to the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report ([IPCC, 2018](#)),

there is already evidence of farmers migrating as temperatures increase, exacerbating inequality as those least able to cope are forced to uproot their lives. Marginalized communities—including indigenous, pastoral, agricultural and coastal communities—will suffer the most as food and water become less available, health risks increase and their lives and livelihoods are jeopardized.

Women farmers remain on the razor edge of extreme shocks to the system and in a warming world, with a growing number of hungry people and more conflicts, they face ever greater risks. Indeed, according to FAO, “Women are slightly more likely to be food insecure than men in every region of the world” (FAO et al., 2017: 11), especially if they live in rural areas, where poverty and food insecurity are very much linked, and especially in a context of increased reliance on markets and a decrease in subsistence agriculture. Current food stresses are linked to prices and access to markets rather than to production (Gaye et al., 2018), but women are vulnerable in all dimensions of food security: availability, access, utilization and stability.

4.1.1 Availability

Twelve years on, food production has increased and remains adequate to feed all of the increased population in all of the world’s regions. Per capita food availability has increased globally over the past 20 years (UN Women, 2014).

Nevertheless, climate change and its impacts on agriculture constitute a substantial threat to food availability. FAO projects that global average cereal yields will decrease by 3%–10% for each degree of warming (FAO, 2018). Africa and a belt stretching from the Middle East through South Asia to mainland South-East Asia and on into Indonesia and the Philippines are forecast to be the regions worst affected by disasters caused by natural hazards associated with climate change (FAO, 2018). This is likely to cause severe harm to harvests and external trade, among other things (FAO, 2018). It is also forecast to increase food prices, most of all in West Africa and India; people’s purchasing power is expected to decline by nearly 12% in West Africa and 6.2% in India (FAO, 2018). Reduced buying power will have severe impacts on rural poor people (FAO, 2018).

Climate variability and extreme weather events can have negative local impacts even when overall national food production figures look good, and this can lead to serious hunger problems in the affected areas (FAO et al., 2018). Rural people in developing countries, who usually have low carbon footprints (Pearl-Martinez, 2017) and depend on renewable natural

resources, are acutely vulnerable to climate shocks and natural hazards, which can result in devastating production losses and undermine their food security and nutrition (FAO et al., 2018). Women have especially high vulnerability as they tend to have less access than men to the resources that can facilitate climate change adaptation, such as social capital, land, finance, credit, health, education, information, mobility and formal employment, and they frequently lack a seat at the decision making table (FAO et al., 2018; Pearl-Martinez, 2017; Quisumbing et al., 2011). Climate change related drought and water scarcity add to their gender-related workloads, such as collecting fuel wood and water (FAO, 2016).

4.1.2 Access

Even when food is available, poor and marginalized people may lack the resources to access it through purchase or production, and too often neither public social protection programs nor private charity reach them, if these even exist in poor countries (Drèze and Sen, 1989). Most often women are expected to find ways to cope with their families' hunger (UN Women, 2014).

Within concentrated global and domestic value chains, women farmers are at risk because of their weak bargaining position: global food industries and supermarket chains play an increasingly prominent role in food supply, and access to food depends on income, price levels and social transfers, factors over which women have no power or in which they face discrimination (UN Women, 2014).

Smallholders find that they are being driven out of markets, squeezed by corporate entities on both the input side (seeds, machinery) and the buyer side (traders, food industry, supermarket chains). Willoughby and Gore (2018) found that in the context of patriarchal norms and social practices, women feel the effects most severely. They are relegated to low-paying and often informal work within agri-food systems, are denied most socio-economic and political rights and are under the threat of sexual harassment and violence. All these factors constrain their ability to access food. A survey of South African grape farm workers in 2018 found that over 90% said that they did not have enough to eat during the prior month. Nearly a third said that they or someone in their family had missed at least one meal in that month (Willoughby and Gore, 2018).

When policies have been implemented to give women better access to markets, they have not necessarily been beneficial. Entering into market relations usually brings large changes—negative or positive—to the ways that people live. These changes can alter relations within the household,

to the benefit or detriment of women. In general, it is widely thought that direct access to income increases a woman's autonomy, but in the household economy it is not always that simple (Britwum, 2009).

Within farming households, there are often gender differences in revenue earning from crops. Men tend to produce high-value crops, leaving women to cultivate traditional produce which may be rich in critical micro-nutrients but has been neglected by post-crisis policies that have primarily targeted cereal production to reach national sufficiency.

An FAO analysis of gender and cash crop production in Ghana found that women cocoa farmers are as productive as men. But because they tend to be more cash strapped than male producers, women cultivators tend to use more labor-intensive and less high-tech approaches than men, which adds to their workloads (FAO, 2011c).

Conflict also has gendered impacts on food security (FAO et al., 2017):

- Men tend to do the bulk of the fighting, leaving women in charge of household livelihoods and wellbeing.
- Violence can directly harm women, and can also reduce their capacity to provide for their families.
- Conflict related displacement also is a major reason for food insecurity, and affects women and children disproportionately.

4.1.3 Utilization

At the household level, women are frequently the ones who eat least, last and least well. Increased poverty in female-headed households affects women's nutrition: to adjust to the decline in their capacity to purchase or grow high-quality, diverse foods, they often shift to cheaper and less diverse diets, which frequently lack the key nutrients that pregnant women and young children require. As FAO (n.d.) has observed, "More often than not, the face of malnutrition is female."

In 2017, global food insecurity rose for the third consecutive year (FAO et al., 2018), and women were the most affected: a third of the world's women of reproductive age suffer from anemia, usually due to iron-deficient diets. This also means risks for the health and nutrition of their children (FAO et al., 2017) and has long-term impacts on development. Worldwide, anemia is a contributing or sole cause of 20%–40% of maternal deaths. Anemic women are twice as likely to die during or shortly after pregnancy as non-anemic mothers (FAO et al., 2018). Because anemia caused by iron deficiency

results in reduced learning capacity and less productive workers, it is estimated to reduce gross domestic product (GDP) by 4% annually, particularly in African and South-East Asian countries ([World Bank, 2004](#)).

Women's malnutrition frequently stems from poverty and unequal intra-household relations. Women who have access to financial resources enjoy greater dietary diversity, and in rural areas women farmers who control resources tend to have better-quality diets ([Lourme-Ruiz et al., 2016](#)).

Even when food is available and relatively accessible, people may not fully meet their nutritional needs. In countries where the calorie supply is adequate, there are still high levels of child stunting, e.g., Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali and Nepal ([Dury and Bocoum, 2012](#); [UN Women, 2014](#)). Climate shocks, conflicts and social factors that increase women farmers' work burdens put their own health at risk and limit their ability to engage in recommended feeding practices for infants and young children ([FAO et al., 2018](#)).

4.1.4 Stability

In many developing countries staples price volatility has persisted, with fresh spikes in 2016 and 2017, and prices have remained above the level of the early 2000s. In the face of volatile prices, people shift their income from other necessities to maintain their access to food, and this means that stable prices are a crucial element of food security ([FAO, 2020](#); [Murphy and Schiavoni, 2017](#)).

Instability on the dimensions of food security over the past 12 years has driven the failure to attain the right to adequate food. This is largely due to political choices concerning food security but also to funding, in terms of quantity, quality, targets and accountability.

4.2 What changes have there been in the institutional and funding agenda to address women's food insecurity?

4.2.1 An institutional step forward

Some major institutions have shifted their narratives to factor gender into their policies and strategies. The UN agencies in particular have worked toward the empowerment of rural women and have helped reframe the agricultural development narrative. After the food price crisis, the Rome-based UN agencies developed their own gender strategies:

- WFP—in 2009 WFP implemented its policy on gender equality for all its programs and projects through an action plan for operability in the

field. The objectives were to bring an adapted approach to food aid considering specific needs, increase women's participation in program design, empower women and girls in decision making and protect women from sexual and gender-based violence (WFP, 2009).

- FAO—in March 2012 FAO adopted its policy on gender equality. The objective was to better target women across all programs through disaggregated gender data and norms and standards in project formulation (FAO, 2013b).
- IFAD—IFAD's gender strategy implemented in 2012 was articulated around three objectives: promote women's economic empowerment, ensure equal participation and influence within institutions and rural organizations and guarantee equity in workloads and in the share of extension services and economic value (IFAD, 2015).
- In 2011 the CFS produced gender and nutrition policy recommendations (CFS, 2011), which included:
 - Affirmative action for women.
 - Enhancing women's role in food security decision making.
 - Enacting legislation to guarantee women's access to resources and services.
- In October 2012, FAO, IFAD, UN Women and WFP launched their joint initiative on Accelerating Progress toward the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (UN Women, 2012). It seeks greater leadership opportunities, better food security and higher incomes for women, as well as to foster greater gender awareness.

In the face of inaction by governments, the UN has taken a step further in legislating around gender inequalities in rural and agricultural sectors over the past 4 years: the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) recognized the myriad challenges facing rural women in 2016, noting that in many cases, the situation has worsened. The Committee also indicated that states should therefore ensure, among other things, that

macroeconomic policies, including trade, fiscal and investment policies, as well as bilateral and multilateral agreements, are responsive to the needs of rural women and strengthen the productive and investing capacities of small-scale women producers. They should address the negative and differential impacts of economic policies, including agricultural and general trade liberalization, privatization and the commodification of land, water and natural resources, on the lives of rural women and the fulfillment of their rights.

CEDAW (2016).

The CFS forum on women's empowerment has pointed to significant gaps in policy implementation: 155 countries have at least one law restricting women's economic opportunities, 100 countries exclude women altogether from certain jobs and 18 leave it to husbands to determine if their wives can work. This forum has urged states to uphold their commitments to rural women's rights under the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (FAO, 2017c). In 2019, the CFS began work on a set of Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Living in Rural Areas, adopted by the General Assembly in 2018, calls on states to

take all appropriate measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against peasant women and other women working in rural areas and to promote their empowerment in order to ensure, on the basis of equality between men and women, that they fully and equally enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms and that they are able to freely pursue, participate in and benefit from rural economic, social, political and cultural development.

UNGA (2019).

4.2.2 Inadequate funding and targeting

The World Bank's *World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development* recognized the importance of smallholder farmers, and especially women. It emphasized the significance of investment in smallholder-led agricultural development for poverty reduction after decades of development processes bypassing small-scale farmers, particularly women cultivators (World Bank, 2008). In the ensuing 12 years, two broad agendas have emerged, with tools that call for more responsible investment in agriculture and tackling gender inequalities: the voluntary sustainability standards (VSS), targeting mainly the private sector, and the responsible investment frameworks in agriculture (RIFs), targeting mainly governments. Important gaps remain in addressing gender inequality and empowering women farmers, and these tools have to be used in the appropriate context so that they work (Sexsmith et al., 2017).

Also in 2008, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation established a gender policy for the agricultural projects that it supports. This seeks to ensure that women benefit and to track project impacts on women and their children and communities (Coon, 2008).

However, since the food price crisis, there is scant evidence that policy responses have taken gender differentials into account, and research in this

area is still patchy. Decades of rhetoric about the greater vulnerability of women have borne limited results in policy action. This neglect is reflected in aid expenditures.

OECD data show that overall bilateral aid targeting gender equality and women's empowerment as either a significant (secondary) or principal (primary) objective in all sectors combined was higher than ever before in 2015–16, corresponding to 37% of total aid. However, the aid activities marked with the principal objective remained consistently below a total of \$5bn per year, representing only 4% of total bilateral allocable aid from Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members in 2015–16. Dedicated support focused on gender equality and women's empowerment as the principal objective in the economic and productive sectors—which encompass agriculture and rural development—decreased from \$616m on average annually in 2013–14 to only \$460m on average in 2015–16, representing less than 2% of aid to these sectors (OECD, 2018b).

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that out of that \$460m, more than half (\$286m) was committed to agriculture and rural development. Even though agriculture is the main economic and productive sector for targeting gender equality, making gender a principal objective of aid to agriculture and rural development is still not high on donors' agendas.

Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that even when donors tag their aid projects with the OECD gender equality markers, this does not necessarily mean that the projects advance gender equality or empower women. Grabowski and Essick examined 72 aid projects carrying the markers and found that only two of them actually met all of the OECD's minimum criteria for using the gender equality project marker (Grabowski and Essick, 2020).

Also, although strong women's rights organizations and movements are recognized as being particularly effective actors in bringing about sustained changes toward gender equality, aid going to these organizations remains extremely modest. In 2015–16, an annual average of \$225m went specifically to women's nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and women's organizations in developing countries received just \$38m of this (OECD, 2018b).

4.2.3 Filling the data gap to assess and address gender inequalities in agriculture

In 2007–08, there was little attention to the gender-disaggregated effects of the food price crisis, including its nutritional impact, coping strategies such as withdrawing girls from school and worsening poverty among female-headed households. The work of Agnes Quisumbing and Ruth Meinzen-Dick and their colleagues at IFPRI (Quisumbing et al., 2011)

and FAO's (2008) *SOFI 2008* are major exceptions. There is still no access to sex-disaggregated data in food security programs (see Box 3) (UN Women, 2014). Of FAO's 40 indicators on food security determinants and outcomes, just one is gender related (anemia among pregnant women) (UN Women, 2014). Lack of sex-disaggregated data on rural populations also hampers implementation of CEDAW's provisions on the rights of rural women.

Data are also lacking in terms of donors' actual funding to support women in farming and adapting to climate change, and not all donors systematically report to the OECD Creditor Reporting System. Moreover, OECD gender equality markers only indicate if a project targets gender equality and whether it is a mainstreamed objective or fundamental to a project's design and expected results. The markers do not distinguish the nuances between projects that target resources to women and those that aim to transform gender relations (Grabowski and Essick, 2020).

As Pearl-Martinez notes, because aid recipient countries fail to gather sex-disaggregated data, it is impossible to track whether ODA reaches women

BOX 3 Collecting high-quality, sex-disaggregated data for better prevention tools: The case of the harmonized framework.¹

Since 1999, the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (Comité permanent Inter-Etats de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel, or CILSS) has been developing and refining its Harmonized Framework (Cadre Harmonisé) for the analysis and identification of risk areas and vulnerable groups in the Sahel and West Africa. The Framework is a tool for food crisis prevention and management, and can identify and analyze zones with populations at high risk of food and nutrition insecurity. The results of these analyses allow the classification of food insecurity on a severity scale and estimates of the most affected populations, as well as projections for lean periods. This tool, targeted at decision makers, could be more qualitative with the inclusion of gender analysis, for example by systematically collecting sex-disaggregated data and evidence. This first step could help characterize food insecurity through a gender lens, and thereby help to better target vulnerable populations.

¹ For additional information on the Framework, see <http://www.cilss.int/index.php/2019/04/11/cadre-harmonise-ch-danalyse-et-didentification-des-zones-a-risque-et-des-populations-en-insecurite-alimentaire-et-nutritionnelle-au-sahel-en-afrique-de-louest-et-au-camer/>.

farmers (Pearl-Martinez, 2017). Tools exist that can be used to measure gender empowerment, e.g., the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index, which the US FTF initiative helped create.^m Such empowerment is essential for transforming rural women's roles in agriculture and food security, as well as for addressing the structural causes of hunger (Coon, 2008).

4.3 Closing the gender gap: Transforming rather than mainstreaming

More investments in agricultural development, even if they target small family farms, do not automatically benefit women and food security. The key questions related to whether agricultural development promotes gender equality include whether women are able to access resources, whether they actually can make decisions about the fruits of productivity and income gains and whether development efforts help them to meet their needs and aspirations (Huyer, 2016).

The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) showed in 2017 that men and women do not benefit equally from foreign investments in agriculture (Sexsmith et al., 2017). Though its analysis looks at private investments, some of the faults detailed are also found in publicly funded development programs:

- Foreign investors tend to reinforce existing inequality in land ownership and control by working only with men who have formal land rights. This can reduce rural women's ability to use common lands to meet household needs.
- Women frequently have difficulties accessing credit and extension services, and so may be excluded from contract farming schemes. These factors also prevent them from benefitting from agricultural innovations.
- Investors tend to overlook women's needs and thereby increase their workload, including their unpaid labor. Foreign investments can increase household incomes, helping women to ensure that their families are food-secure, but if this requires producing export crops instead of food crops for the household's own consumption, it entails new food security risks, e.g., greater vulnerability to volatile global commodity prices and increased competition.
- Investment projects reinforce rather than transform gender divisions of labor, with women remaining in insecure and often informal jobs.

^m For further detail, the WEAI Resource Center at <http://weai.ifpri.info/>.

- Projects also tend to fail to change women's under-representation in cooperatives and agricultural worker organizations, and particularly in leadership roles in these groups.

Gender integration in agricultural development and food security policies and programs requires ex ante impact assessment to ensure respect for the “do no harm” principle, considering local social and cultural contexts and how these shape women's ability to participate in development activities. In particular, projects must consider who controls assets within the household and seek to redress inequities. Failing to do so will simply reinforce existing gender norms and inequalities (Quisumbing et al., 2015). Poorly designed agricultural development interventions can lead to the increased marginalization of women in decision making. Too often, projects require beneficiaries to have minimum levels of education and access to credit, for example, prerequisites that wind up excluding women (Dury et al., 2015). A gender strategy can help project staff better understand the potential gendered impacts of their interventions, and who is likely to benefit (Quisumbing et al., 2015). Boxes 4 and 5 discuss gender integration efforts in rural development projects in Haiti and Nigeria.

BOX 4 Case study—Food Insecurity among rural Haitian women.ⁿ

Haiti is the poorest country in the western hemisphere and has one of the most unequal income distributions on the planet. Agriculture remains central to development in the country, accounting for 50% of employment and 22% of GDP. Yet poverty pervades the Haitian countryside, with 90% of the population living below the poverty line (compared with an overall national poverty rate of 59%) (IFAD, n.d.; World Bank, 2019).

Hunger and malnutrition go hand in hand with low incomes: 40% of all Haitian households experience food insecurity and 30% of pre-school children are chronically malnourished (USAID-Haiti, 2017).

Rural women in Haiti are especially vulnerable. According to a study for USAID, 49% of all Haitian women are anemic. Women are 20 percentage points more likely than men to be unemployed, and on average they earn more than 30% less than men. In the countryside, rural women have inadequate access to land and participate less than men in high-value agricultural activities.

Continued

ⁿ Adapted from Anglade et al. (2019), which provides full documentation.

BOX 4 Case study—Food Insecurity among rural Haitian women.ⁿ—cont’d

This affects the quantity and quality of the food that they are able to consume. In addition, nearly half of rural Haitian women should be considered “not empowered,” due to their heavy workloads (including many unpaid household responsibilities), lack of ability to make decisions related to agriculture and lack of membership in groups such as farmers’ associations or cooperatives (Rames et al., 2016).

In 2010, the US government made Haiti one of its FTF “focus countries.” According to an assessment of AVANSE, the Feed the Future North project in Haiti, the project provided women with 30%–40% of the benefits (Anglade et al., 2019). So AVANSE can be characterized as “gender-sensitive,” in that project staff explicitly sought to mainstream gender and include women and their organizations in activities (AVANSE, 2016). However, the project was not gender-transformative, as it did not challenge traditional gender roles in rural northern Haiti. It engaged women in what is locally considered “women’s work,” e.g., small-scale, wholesale marketing of farm produce and the heavy manual labor of building soil and water conservation structures such as terraces and retaining walls. Participating farmers at various project sites told the assessment team that “*kek grenn fanm*” (just a few women) were engaged in growing rice through AVANSE.

The assessment recommended that agricultural development efforts in rural Haiti such as AVANSE make more concerted efforts to consult with women farmers about their needs and priorities, and give them the opportunity to participate in all project activities, including production of all kinds of crops and livestock.

BOX 5 Increasing disposable income for women’s food security and empowerment in Nigeria.

Food prices in Nigeria have trended upwards since 2003 (Samuels et al., 2011), reaching a peak in 2010 that negatively affected poor consumers’ access to food. In a country very dependent on imports of commodities, the agriculture sector represents a large part of the economy, employing 70% of working Nigerians, mainly as smallholders with below poverty line incomes (Matemilola and Elegbede, 2017). Women farmers have less access than male cultivators to land, inputs, paid labor and extension services, and this means that they tend to grow and earn less. In response, many national and international programs have been implemented in Nigeria (Matemilola and Elegbede, 2017), but not many have targeted smallholder farmers and women. At a national level, Nigeria is far from the 10% CAADP target for agriculture’s share of the national budget, with the figure remaining below 2% as of 2016 (Mwanzia, 2017). Very little attention is given

BOX 5 Increasing disposable income for women's food security and empowerment in Nigeria.—cont'd

to specific budget lines for women, youth and marginalized segments of communities. In 2016, gender and youth were lumped together in the budget and only 1% of proposed projects for them were funded (Mwanzia, 2017). International initiatives have not tackled this issue either, but some programs, like the one described below, have tried to recognize the productive capacity of female small-scale producers and empower them to significantly reduce food insecurity.

Since 2015, Oxfam has led a Village Savings and Loans (VSL)^o program in Nigeria, allowing small groups of 15–25 villagers to create a common savings fund from which all group members can take loans. One of the main goals of these groups is to increase women's access to financial resources, and eventually to empower women economically, socially and politically. Women represent 75% of program participants.

A 2016–18 baseline study examined the VSL program's impacts on women's empowerment. One of the direct impacts is on community food security. In 2017, some of the respondents, mostly women, reported having fewer than three meals per day in some villages, but in 2018 all respondents in all villages reported three meals per day.

This improvement can be directly linked to the increased financial capacities of women participants. The following assertion from a woman beneficiary in the village of Kebbi shows that VSL allowed her to diversify her household's sources of income, and gave her more choices in buying food to ensure household food security: "Before joining the VSL group, I needed to seek permission to buy even soup condiments because the money comes from my husband. But after joining VSL, I am empowered and don't need to seek permission before making little purchases."

The program has indeed had a positive impact on joint decision making at the household level because women now contribute fully to expenditures. "I now contribute with money to support my husband, and this is possible because I joined VSL," said a woman from Adamawa State. Another, from Guyuk village, added: "When my husband sells a goat, we discuss how to spend that money. I am very happy, everything has changed."

VSL has also contributed to a change of perceptions on women's social role and has reinforced their participation in community political decision making. A woman from Kebbi reported: "Since I joined VSL, I am being respected by all. Often times, I am being included as an executive member of most committees constituted in my community."

^o The VSL is a methodology invented by CARE International in 1991. Since then, the VSL methodology has been implemented worldwide by several NGOs, including Oxfam. The authors are grateful to Oxfam in Nigeria for providing information on the program used here.

A 2019 study analyzing policy documents in Uganda found that the rhetoric of “gender mainstreaming” was well integrated, but that this was insufficient to advance gender equality, given the lack of concrete implementation efforts. The study also found that the documents used mainstreaming in a way that tended to depoliticize gender (Acosta et al., 2019).



5. Conclusion and recommendations

Multiple food supply and demand factors triggered the food price crisis of 2007–08. Price spikes also revealed how the structural evolution of the global food system has fomented inequalities in accessing food.

The food price crisis denied the right to adequate food to whole categories of people who have suffered long-term impacts. Women have experienced disproportionate effects because they face discrimination at both the societal level and within their own households, with profound effects on their right to food.

The global response to the crisis has been very visible, with many actors involved and numerous commitments, new initiatives and instruments launched by intergovernmental bodies, countries, global donors and private stakeholders. However, funding has been insufficient and the policy response has mainly targeted production issues instead of focusing on the right to food, especially of women.

After 12 years, global food security governance is highly fragmented, with the power of a small number of actors increasing dramatically. Those actors include major multinational corporations, the World Bank and the IMF and the G7 governments. The voices of the people who have been left food-insecure are seldom heard in policy discussions.

Funding targeted at women in agriculture is insignificant compared with other official funding, and this public disinvestment opens the door to other actors, such as multinational companies, which have taken a “business as usual” approach and make gender equality in agriculture a low priority at best.

Especially in light of climate change and increased conflicts, failing to address the structural causes of the food price crisis has put women even more at risk on all dimensions of food security. In order to start tackling these challenges, we offer the following recommendations:

5.1 Guarantee participation and inclusiveness

- Developing country governments and donors should support inclusive agricultural transformation and create an enabling environment for both female and male farmers to exercise their rights. This should include reducing power imbalances and supporting national-level land reforms.

- Governments and donors must make women's economic empowerment in agriculture a high priority. Actions should include greater support for women farmers' organizations and for developing markets for crops that women tend to produce.^P
- Local communities, farmer organizations, rural women's organizations and other relevant civil society actors should be involved in the design of food and agricultural policies. Governments and donors need to take a rights-based approach, including ex ante target group identification, ex ante gender analyses and affirmative action addressing the needs of women (e.g., extension services reaching out to them and employing female extension agents). Special attention should be paid to ensuring that women participate in decision making at all levels.

5.2 Increase aid to agriculture

- Policies and funding should support and promote women smallholder farmers in achieving SDG 2 by facilitating the self-organization of women and women's organizations.
- Donors should encourage multilateral agencies, such as the World Bank and IFAD, to increase the share of their agricultural spending that supports gender equality.
- Development aid providers should increase the quantity and quality of aid and support to focus on women smallholders, promoting low-input, climate-resilient practices, particularly soil restoration, crop diversification and water conservation and management.
- Investments in small-scale agriculture should be combined with and complementary to other initiatives that seek to restore the rights and decision-making power of women smallholder farmers, including initiatives that seek to increase women's access to education and encourage families to share the responsibilities of unpaid care work, as well as legal efforts to give women the same rights as men.

5.3 Increase national public investments in agriculture in developing countries

- Developing country governments should increase public investment in agriculture, with a focus on both women and men smallholder farmers and sustainable, climate-resilient approaches to agricultural

^P For more on this recommendation, see [Willoughby \(2014\)](#).

development, and should include specific line items in their agriculture budgets to support women farmers.

- Governments should ensure that women farmers' associations and women's rights organizations are able to participate in budget decision making.
- African governments should make meeting and then exceeding their CAADP pledges on allocating 10% of national budgets to agriculture a top priority. These budgets should emphasize public investment rather than recurrent spending such as salaries for public officials.
- Developing country governments should adopt national policies that prioritize food production and discourage the diversion of farmland to large-scale production of crops for export and biofuels.⁹
- Governments should create public databases on land ownership and the terms and conditions of large-scale land transactions.
- Donors should help strengthen developing country governments' capacity to negotiate with investors in large-scale land transactions.
- Governments should facilitate the participation of civil society, farmers' organizations and women's organizations in the development and governance of food reserves. Bilateral and multilateral donors should provide financial and technical assistance to establishment of reserves.

5.4 Ensure women's access to resources, competitive markets and farmers' rights

- Agriculture policies should facilitate women's access to inputs, resources and services.
- Governments should develop accountability mechanisms to ensure that national and transnational companies do not violate land rights and should ensure gender equality in land governance.
- Governments should enact or enforce existing competition or antitrust legislation to regulate excessive private power in markets. Governments should cooperate on a regional and global basis to enforce competition policies.
- National seed policies and legislation on plant breeders' rights should ensure the right of women and men smallholder farmers to save, reuse, exchange and sell seeds.

⁹ For more detail, see [Bernabe \(2012\)](#).

5.5 Address climate change

- Developed country governments should increase climate change adaptation financing.
- Donors should increase efforts to promote gender equality through their bilateral climate adaptation finance by significantly increasing the share of adaptation projects that have gender equality as a principal (DAC marker 2) or significant (marker 1) objective.

5.6 Collect sex-disaggregated data to assess gender inequalities in agriculture

- Research institutions and agrarian and economic policy forums should seek quality sex-disaggregated data, with strong gender indicators, from all actors, and especially from governments and donors reporting on gender policy markers. They should also lead robust qualitative research to understand women's and men's experiences in agriculture, rural development, food security and nutrition.

5.7 Defend the role of the CFS in food security governance

- FAO member states should defend the CFS by refocusing the governance of food security on this platform, reaffirming its sole legitimacy in global food security governance, guaranteeing the decision making and accountability of states and reinforcing the participation of CSOs. They should also allocate adequate funding to its activities to provide sufficient leverage for action, and adopt its recommendations into national laws and policy frameworks.

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